

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000215

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/S

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [LT](#)

SUBJECT: POSITIONS DON'T CHANGE

REF: MASERU 213

-----  
SUMMARY  
-----

1. This is one of a series of messages on Lesotho's upcoming elections. The tripartite meeting between the Government of Lesotho, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and 24 political parties took place on April 26 at the Convention Center. The convocation was facilitated by the diplomatic corps and the donor community. Chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Lehohla, the objectives of the meeting were to support free, fair, transparent and secure elections on the published date and to ensure inclusion of all stakeholders in advance of April 30 polling. The discussion ranged from government's strong support for adherence to all objectives to major opposition parties' walk-out in protest against postponement. The international community provided brief remarks as the DPM adjourned the session urging adherence to the schedule and assuring there would be peaceful progression of the elections. End Summary.  
-----

Key Positions Reiterated  
-----

2. Following several months' long series of meetings among government, political parties, local authorities and the diplomatic community, the Deputy Prime Minister agreed (as requested by some parties) to convene a large forum of key political parties and international donors. Commonwealth observers also took part in the forum. In his opening remarks, the DPM laid out the history of the GOL's and the IEC's discussions with the opposition parties and indicated he believed it was now time to move forward. Opposition leader General Lekhanya and others challenged the legality of the GOL's proceeding with the first local elections since independence and called for postponement.  
-----

Reasons to Move Ahead  
-----

3. In response, Minister of Communications Thabane, outlined the reasons Lesotho had to continue on the path of democracy. He emphasized that "friends around the globe" had been assured that the nation would proceed with these elections (already delayed since the late 2003 date originally set) and could not afford to stall any further. The IEC Chairman stated that the Commission's door had been open to all parties and remained open; he asserted that the IEC had attempted to respond to all queries from stakeholders. He also reminded the participants that of 4,762 candidates, 2000 were independents.  
-----

Opposition Walk-Out  
-----

4. The Basotho National Party (BNP) and five other major opposition political parties objected to the refusal of postponement and walked out of the meeting. The Deputy Prime Minister declared that other parties deserved to be heard despite the six parties' refusal to stay. Among the smaller parties was heard a theme: the people on the ground want to have the elections and move forward. The Deputy Chairman of the Lesotho Education Party pleaded with the GOL leaders (represented also by the Minister of Local Government) not to deny "freedom" to people in the rural areas. A splinter group of the Maramatlou Freedom Party (MFP) argued the elections must go ahead as did the National Independence Party representative who recalled violence of the past (e.g., 1998 disturbances) and pressed for adherence to the schedule. The Popular Front for Democracy observed that a pending court case charging discrimination against men and calling for postponement would be decided on April 27. That ruling, he contended would determine the outcome.  
-----

5. In a final statement of the ruling Lesotho Congress for Democracy's position, Deputy House Speaker Montanyane posited that Lesotho had prepared for these elections at length and at a cost of 93 million maloti, approx. 13-14 million USD, and postponement would cost another 50 million. He also argued that delays would set back local elections until 2006, just one year before national elections are to take place.  
-----

International Community's Support  
-----

6. The DPM invited the diplomatic corps to make individual statements, specifically asking U.S. Ambassador Perry to comment. She responded that as Lesotho pursued its path to democracy, the international community encouraged the country to pursue free, fair and peaceful elections on April 30 but called

upon the UNDP Resident Representative (as agreed) to speak for the international community as a whole. ResRep Haji-Mohamud repeated the call for transparency and security and pledged the international community would continue to play a supportive post-elections role. The Deputy Prime Minister adjourned the meeting with assurances to donors that the GOL was committed to free, fair and peaceful elections and was committed also to both security and to uplifting local government, the base upon which good governance is built.

-----

MASERU 00000215 002 OF 002

Comment

-----

17. Comment: The tripartite session was not disrupted by the walkout and achieved the goal of inclusiveness. However, the key opposition parties scheduled a press conference for later in the day; results are not yet known. The diplomatic/donor community has set up a meeting with the rebellious group of seven for late April 26 to again press the need for Lesotho to have peaceful, democratic elections at this critical time in its social and economic development. End Comment.

PERRY